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Social Justice, Personalism, and the Practice of Librarianship

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Social Justice, Personalism, and the Practice of Librarianship

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"to bring glad tidings to the poor... to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free" (Lk 4:18).

The Search for a Unified Philosophy of Librarianship

Librarians have long sought a unified philosophy of service. Over the last few years a number of association initiatives have endeavored to define the credo of our profession. Outstanding among these are the Core Values Task Force of the American Library Association and the California Library Association Task Force on the Future of Librarianship.[1] Wallace Koehler has outlined the ethical precepts library and information professionals acknowledge through their professional associations and personal beliefs with citations to statements from associations throughout the world. [2] Also of great interest is the website, "Defining Librarianship," on which the author, Jud Barry notes, "If librarianship is to continue as a venture shared by all who pursue it, it needs what it does not now have: unifying expressions of commonality, of distinctiveness, and of perduring value." [3]

Today's librarianship also needs a political economy, states William F. Birdsall in an article arguing that developments in technology cannot be divorced from political and economic forces driving technological change. [4] While Birdsall is quite right to suggest that the library profession should play a critical advocacy and political role in creating a new telecommunications environment to insure citizen access to knowledge, what is needed first is an analysis of the philosophy and faith that would impassion commitment to such a role.

In this essay aspects of action carried out in the Catholic tradition of social justice are reviewed to help develop an understanding of a way of practicing librarianship that fits with the mission statement of the Catholic Library Association:

> "Established in 1921, the Catholic Library Association is an international membership organization, providing its members professional development through educational and networking experiences, publications, scholarships, and other services. The Catholic Library Association coordinates the exchange of ideas, provides a source of inspirational support and guidance in ethical issues related to librarianship, and offers fellowship for those who seek, serve, preserve, and share the word in all its forms."[5]

As can be surmised from the diverse values discussed by the authors noted above, there is room for values that may have a different focus within the more broadly accepted generalist structures.

Social Justice, Information Equity, and Librarianship

New librarians are likely to be introduced to values of the profession by Richard Rubin in his basic

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[1]American Library Association, Core Values Task Force. Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.ala.org/congress/corevalues/index.html; California Library Association, "CLA Task Force on the Future of Librarianship." Accessed October 18, 2001. http://cla-net.org/pubs/future.html

[2]Wallace Koehler, "Ethics Links to Library and Information Manger Associations WWW Pages." http://purl.oclc.org/NET/www.ou.edu/cas/slis/ethics/EthicsBibOrg.htm Accessed October 18, 2001.

[3]Jud Barry, "Defining Librarianship: Finding the Essential Base." Accessed October 18, 2001. http://librarians.freeservers.com/

[4]William F. Birdsall, "A Political Economy of Librarianship," *Progressive Librarian* 18 (Summer 2001): 1-8.

[5]Catholic Library Association. "Mission Statement." October 18, 2001. http://www.cathla.org/clainfo.html#Anchor-Mission-41681

text, *Foundations of Library and Information Science.* Values held by librarians have been characterized by Rubin as service; importance of books and reading; respect for truth and the search for the truth; tolerance; the public good; justice; and aesthetics.[6] If these are, indeed, librarianship's most generally accepted values, how might they evolve in juxtaposition with ideals such as social justice?

This writer has suggested that the purpose of librarianship can be designated succinctly by applying Ockham's Razor, that entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity. Thus, the goal of our profession is *information equity.* Inherent in this goal is social justice—working for universal literacy; defending intellectual freedom; preserving and making accessible the human record to all.[7] *Information equity* is used to provide a phrase that distills the essence of librarianship to parallel the medical profession's goal of *healing* and the legal profession's goal of *justice.* My characterization of librarianship focusing on equity, which encompasses social justice, is the result of two major influences during my thirty years as a librarian:

1) ***Ideals of The Catholic Worker Movement,*** founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in 1933, grounded in a firm belief in the God-given dignity of every human person and carried forth in the pages of its newspaper, *The Catholic Worker.*[8] Cardinal John O'Connor announced the approval of the Holy See for the Archdiocese of New York to open the Cause for the Beatification and Canonization of Dorothy Day (March 2000). With this approval came the title, " Servant of God." [9] In the prayer for the canonization of Dorothy Day, Servant of God, distributed by Claretian Publications it is noted: "By constant practice of the works of mercy, she embraced poverty and witnessed steadfastly to justice and peace. Count her among your saints and lead us all to become friends of the poor ones of the earth, and to recognize you in them." [10]

An extraordinary resource to understand the roots of the Catholic Worker movement has been written and posted on the web by Louise and Mark Zwick of Casa Juan Diego. [11] Casa Juan Diego was founded in 1980, following the Catholic Worker model of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, to serve immigrants and refugees. From one small house it has grown to fifteen houses. The writings posted on the website as published in *The Houston Catholic Worker* illuminate the growth of the movement to serve the poor and seek social justice.

The Catholic Library Association included the Marquette University Catholic Social Action Archives as a program at the 2001 Annual Conference. In an article in *Catholic Library World,* archivist Phillip M. Runkel described the collection for those who seek additional information on Dorothy Day and The Catholic Worker Movement.[12] A comprehensive bibliography is posted at the website of the Catholic Worker Movement.[13]

Many have been influenced by the writings and life of Dorothy Day. In her monograph, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement,* Nancy L. Roberts lists a number of individuals, including Michael Harrington (*The Other America*); Abigail Quigley McCarthy (*Private Faces/Public Places);* Senator Eugene J. McCarthy *(The Ultimate Tyranny);* Arthur Sheehan (biographies of Peter Maurin and Pierre Toussant); J.F. Powers; John C. Cort (*Christian So-*

[6]Richard E. Rubin, *Foundations of Library and Information Science,* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2000), pp. 248-260.

[7]Kathleen de la Peña McCook, *Using Ockham's Razor: Cutting to the Center.* Paper for American Library Association, Congress on Professional Education (1999). Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.ala.org/congress/mccook.html

[8]Tom Cornell, "A Brief Introduction to The Catholic Worker Movement." The Catholic Worker Movement. Accessed October 18, 2001.http://www.catholicworker.org/historytext.cfm?Number=4

[9]Cardinal John O'Connor. "Dorothy Day's Sainthood Cause Begins." Archdiocese of New York, March 16, 2000. Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.ny-archdiocese.org/cardinal/columns_Archive.cfm

[10]"Prayer for the Canonization of Servant of God, Dorothy Day." The Catholic Worker Movement, Dorothy Day Library. Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/index.cfm. See also "Dorothy Day—A Saint for Our Times." *Salt of the Earth: Online Resource for Social Justice.* (March 2000) Accessed October 18, 2001. http://salt.claretianpubs.org/sjnews/2000/03/day.html

[11]Mark and Louise Zwick, "Roots of the Catholic Worker Movement; Saints and Philosophers Who Influenced Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin." *Houston Catholic Worker* (Casa Juan Diego.) Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.cjd.org/paper/roots/rintro.html

[12]Phillip M. Runkel, "Catholic Social Action Records at Marquette University," *Catholic Library World* 72 (September, 2001): 28-33. See also the website for the archives. Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.marquette.edu/library/collections/archives/day.html

[13]*General Bibliography of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement.* The Catholic Worker Movement. Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.catholicworker.org/search/bibliogeneral.cfm. Includes Anthologies of writings by Dorothy Day; Biographies of Dorothy Day; Dorothy Day - philosophy and spirituality; Books about the Catholic Worker Movement; Books by or about other Catholic Worker leaders; theses; periodical articles and newspapers. See also: Klejment, Anne. *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker: a Bibliography and Index.* New York, Garland, c.1986.

cialism); James H. Forest (*The Ladder of the Beatitudes,* International Fellowship of Reconciliation); Revs. Daniel and Philip Berrigan; and Eileen Egan (Pax Christi). [14]

Living in justice and charity, practicing the works of mercy, aims of The Catholic Worker Movement, have been reemphasized by the Jubilee Pledge of the Catholic Bishops which includes the challenge to "SERVE those who are poor and vulnerable, sharing more time and talent."[15] What a right and just challenge for librarians.

2) ***Ideals of the American Library Association, Social Responsibilities Round Table,*** (SRRT) are congruent with much of the spirit of The Catholic Worker Movement -- especially through the work of the SRRT Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty Task Force. SRRT works to establish progressive priorities not only for the ALA, but also for the entire profession through concern for human and economic rights and a belief that libraries and librarians must recognize and help solve social problems and inequities in order to carry out their mandate to work for the common good and bolster democracy.[16] SRRT grew out of dissent with the inertia of the status quo of neutrality on social issues demonstrated by many librarians during the late sixties.[17]

Through efforts of members of SRRT the American Library Association approved a "Poor People's Policy" in 1990, but it went long unnoticed and unimplemented. In 1996 SRRT formed a Task Force on Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty (HHP) to resurrect and promote the "Poor People's Policy." Subsequently, the HHP Task Force mounted major conference programs, secured policy-support from ALA Presidential candidates, initiated an SRRT resolution on poverty-related subject headings, distributed resources and information, encouraged the Office for Literacy & Outreach Services Advisory Committee to create a Poverty Subcommittee, published a first-ever statement on class and libraries in *American Libraries,* and spawned an activist's "cookbook," *Poor People and Library Services,* edited by Task Force member Karen Venturella. [18]

The "Poor People's Policy" states, "The American Library Association promotes equal access to information for all persons, and recognizes the urgent need to respond to the increasing number of poor children, adults and families in America. These people are affected by a combination of limitations, including illiteracy, illness, social isolation, homelessness, hunger, and discrimination, which hamper the effectiveness of traditional library services. Therefore it is crucial that libraries recognize their role in enabling poor people to participate fully in a democratic society, by utilizing a wide variety of available resources and strategies." The policy objectives include training to sensitize library staff to issues affecting poor people and to attitudinal and other barriers that hinder poor people's use of libraries, and promoting among library staff the collection of food and clothing donations, volunteering personal time to anti-poverty activities and contributing money to direct-aid organizations. [19]

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[14]Nancy L. Roberts, *Dorothy Day and The Catholic Worker* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), pp. 170-172. This is by no means a full accounting, but gives an idea of the range of the influence of The Catholic Worker Movement. Each of these individuals wrote or worked extensively for social justice. These are just a few examples. Revs. Daniel and Philip Berrigan (Daniel and Philip Berrigan Collection, #4602. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Accessed October 18, 2001. http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/ead/pages/RMM04602.html; John C. Cort, *Christian Socialism: An Informal History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988); Eileen Egan (Pax Christi. Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.paxchristiusa.org/index.html). James H. Forest, *The Ladder of the Beatitudes* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999.), International Fellowship of Reconciliation. Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.ifor.org/index.htm); Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965); Abigail Quigley McCarthy, *Private Faces/ Public Places* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972); October 18, 2001. http://minerva.stkate.eduoffices%5Cadministrative%5Ccommunications.nsf/pages/abigail; Senator Eugene J. McCarthy, *The Ultimate Tyranny: the Majority Over the Minority* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980); J.F. Powers; Arthur Sheehan, (biographies of Peter Maurin and Pierre Toussant).

[15]United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *In All Things Charity: A Pastoral Challenge for the New Millennium.* A Jubilee Pledge for Charity, Justice, and Peace: A Catholic Commitment for the New Millennium. (November 1999). Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.nccbuscc.org/cchd/charity.htm

[16]Social Responsibilities Round Table. Accessed October 18, 2001. http://libr.org/SRRT/

[17]Toni Samek, *Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility in American Librarianship, 1967-1974* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001).

[18]Sanford Berman, "Libraries, Class and the Poor People's Policy," *American Libraries* 29 (March 1998): 38; Karen M. Venturella, ed., *Poor People and Library Services.* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1998); SRRT Hunger, Homelessness, and Poverty Task Force. Accessed October 18, 2001. http://libr.org/HHP/

[19]American Library Association Policy Manual. "Library Services for the Poor." Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.ala.org/alaorg/policymanual/poorservice.html

There is no concrete connection that can be identified between The Catholic Worker Movement as expressed in its publications and the ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table as expressed in its publications. The only link is those librarians who may ascribe to the philosophies expressed by both. In fact some members of the SRRT Task Force on Hunger, Homeless and Poverty might be bemused at the parallels of values and goals between the two. Yet, the daily practice of librarianship may well integrate these ideals.

Personalism in the Practice of Librarianship

What is different for each of us is how much individual commitment we make to the development of equity concerning access to information and to share the word in all its forms. When life is lived through the eyes of poor people, a serious engagement in social transformation results. In his book, *Voice of the Voiceless,* the martyr of El Salvador, Archbishop Oscar A. Romero explored the meaning of community in a dangerous and repressive regime. [20] Dorothy Day, follower of the 'little way' of St. Therese of Lisieux, lived in a radical community that welcomed, with dignity, all who came. The writing of these two sojourners provides those who work in libraries with an understanding of the importance of community in the context of social justice. Like schools, hospitals, and places of faith, libraries have been built in the poorest and most dangerous communities. Librarians serve all who come through their doors. Many librarians are working to transform violated and broken communities to build communities of readers.[21]

Librarians may gain inspiration to work with the poor and fight for social justice from Catholic lay people like Dorothy Day. They may also gain a sense of awe in contemplating the commitment to human rights and truth in the life of Monseñor Juan José Gerardi Condera, who was assassinated in 1998 after submitting *Guatemala: Nunca Mas (Never Again)*, the human rights report that detailed atrocities committed during the 36-year civil war. They may gain a sense of humility reflecting on the assassination in May 2001 of Sister Barbara Ann Ford, Sister of Charity, who had assisted Monseñor Gerardi [22] Truly these believed in truth and human rights with a transcendent conviction.

A way for librarians—especially those working within the social justice traditions of Catholicism—is the "little way" of St. Therese, using the ideals of personalism as practiced by Dorothy Day. This is not to state that this is the only manner to practice librarianship, but this is a manner not described in the literature of librarianship that might provide, for some, an actualization of the ideals of social justice that can be carried out on a daily basis.

"Personalism," as characterized in *The Aims and Means of The Catholic Worker Movement,* "is a philosophy which regards the freedom and dignity of each person as the basis, focus and goal of all metaphysics and morals. In following personalism, we move away from a self-centered individualism toward the good of the other. This is to be done by taking personal responsibility for changing conditions, rather than looking to the state or other institutions to provide impersonal 'charity.'" [23] In their essay, "Emmanuel Mounier, Personalism, and the Catholic Worker Movement," Mark and Louise Zwick quote Mounier: "A personalist civilization is one whose structure and spirit are directed towards the development as persons of all the individuals constituting it. They have as their ultimate end to enable every individual to live as a person, that is, to exercise a maximum of initiative, responsibility, and spiritual life." [24]

These ideas might provide a convergence of sympathies by which the ideals of social justice in librarianship could begin to be accomplished. One of

[20] Oscar A. Romero, *Voice of the Voiceless: the Four Pastoral Letters and Other Statements* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

[21] Kathleen de la Peña McCook, "To live in Community is not a matter of choice but a Calling." Speech given at the ALA President's Program. July 9, 2000. Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.sarahlong.org/Highlights/presprog2.htm

[22] *Guatemala, Nunca Mas.* Recovery of Historical Memory Project. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999). Produced by the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala (ODHA), which Gerardi founded with others in 1990. For further background see James Torrens, "Of Many Things," *America* 178 (May 12, 1998): 2; Stephen A. Privette, "Guatemala Report," *Commonweal* 125 (May 22, 1998): 9-10; Lucia Rossett, "Sr. Barbara Ford, 1939-2001," *The Catholic Worker* (June-July 2001): 4.

[23] *The Aims and Means of The Catholic Worker Movement. The Catholic Worker* (May 2001): 4. Also on The Catholic Worker Movement website. Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.catholicworker.org/aimsandmeanstext.cfm?Number=5

[24] Mark and Louise Zwick. "Emmanuel Mounier, Personalism, and the Roots of The Catholic Worker Movement." *Houston Catholic Worker* (Casa Juan Diego.) Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.cjd.org/paper/roots/rmounier.html. "Emmanuel Mounier and Personalism." Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.cjd.org/paper/roots/remman.html .

the dilemmas that face those in the American Library Association, who wish to establish a role for social responsibility is that the larger association continually questions the appropriateness of actions for human rights and social justice within a professional organization.[25]

There is little written in the context of the American Library Association outside the Social Responsibilities Round Table or its affiliate, The Progressive Librarians Guild, which addresses concerns for social justice. Affiliate organizations such as the American Indian Library Association, Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association, Black Caucus of ALA, Chinese-American Librarians Association, REFORMA (National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking) act in outreach and advocacy roles. In doing research for this essay, I was again and again drawn to the work of Mark and Louise Zwick who have written a number of publications that illuminate The Catholic Worker Movement. An interview with this Catholic Worker couple included the information that Louise Zwick had worked as a librarian.[26]

David Suiter, during his service as Acting Dean of Libraries at Regis University, has written about how an academic library can contribute to a Jesuit university's mission which includes social justice " so that every undertaking, every inquiry, every learning encounter becomes meaningful: to find one another in our endeavors—in short, to see God in all. Simply put, if God is infinite, then God may be made apparent in all things. Thus, in Regis' educational context, this means on the one hand, that free inquiry becomes not just a nice educational ideal, but is essential to the discovery of God. And on the other hand, limited or controlled inquiry stifles the possibilities, especially for those who might not find God in any other way. Our intellectual and social history is replete with examples of those who have undertaken an engagement with views contrary to their impulses and discovered new ways to embrace the future. ... Librarians are an important part of the process of bringing all resources to bear on one's information needs." [27]

Conclusion

This new millennium may be the time for librarians committed to serving the poor and working for human rights to come together. Recently the Simon Wiesenthal Center- Museum for Tolerance announced a program for librarians, Tools for Tolerance, "to assist teams of library personnel in effectively serving a diverse clientele and creating an inclusive workplace. By gaining a heightened awareness regarding issues of diversity, participants will utilize what they have learned to better understand their capacity to effect and influence social change. Participants will develop a Library Tolerance Plan, a blueprint for individual and collaborative action to promote social justice."[28] In a less structured fashion the Catholic Worker Movement offers a similar way of practicing librarianship providing a philosophical and personalist framework as an alternative to the growing commodification of information and growth of materialistic social arrangements.

I am not a scholar of Catholic theology. I am simply a teacher of librarians who has been seeking a philosophy to activate some of the ideals of the SRRT, especially in service to poor people and in support of human rights.[29] Because I think that many of these ideas may be found in the writings of The Catholic Worker Movement, especially the belief in the importance of daily acts of conscientious service, it seemed appropriate to discuss these ideas on these pages. I hope that by presenting these thoughts others may consider them as well.

Books by Dorothy Day:

The Eleventh Virgin. New York, Albert & Charles Boni, c.1924.

From Union Square to Rome. New York, Arno Press, 1978 c.1938.

House of Hospitality. New York, Sheed & Ward, c.1939.

On Pilgrimage. New York, Catholic Worker Books, c.1948. 175p.

The Long Loneliness: the Autobiography of Dorothy Day. San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1981. c.1952.

Loaves and Fishes. San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1983 c.1963.

On Pilgrimage: The Sixties. New York, Curtis Books, c.1972.

Therese. Springfield,IL, Templegate, c.1979.

[25]Mark Rosenzwieg, "Politics and Anti-Politics in Libraianship," Progressive Librarian 3 (Summer 1991). Also available as accessed August 2, 2001 http://www.libr.org/PL/3 Editorial.html .

[26]"Serving the Poor: Mark and Louise Zwick," Aqua et Ignis: Monthly Review of Faith and Culture (October, 1999). Accessed August 2, 2001 http://:www.aquaetignis.org/archives/d 11 99.html.

[27]David Suiter, "Director's Report," *DataLink* 102. Colorado Alliance of Research Libraries. January 2001. Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.coalliance.org/datalink/jan01/index.html

[28] Simon Wiesenthal Center- Museum for Tolerance. "Tools for Tolerance to Enhance Library Services." Accessed October 18, 2001. http://www.wiesenthal.com/library/grant.cfm

[29]Kathleen de la Peña McCook, "Poverty, Democracy, and Public Libraries," pp. 28-46 in *Libraries and Democracy: The Cornerstone of Liberty* ed. Nancy Kranich (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2001).